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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 13 July 2004, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Penjo (Vice-President) ..... (Bhutan)

Contents

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance (*continued*)

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In the absence of Ms. Risa (Finland), Mr. Penjo (Bhutan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Special economic, humanitarian and disaster relief assistance (*continued*) (A/59/86-E/2004/69 and A/59/93-E/2004/74)

Panel discussion on strengthening preparedness and response to natural disasters, with an emphasis on capacity-building

1. **The President** said that the impact of natural disasters was an urgent and growing problem that affected all countries. Although natural hazards occurred in both developed and developing countries, they often affected developing countries more severely, leaving large numbers of people chronically vulnerable. In 2003, some 700 disasters had caused 75,000 deaths — a toll almost seven times that of the previous year, resulting in economic losses of over US$ 65 billion. A number of emerging trends pointed to even bleaker prospects for the future. The international community needed to take an integrated approach to natural disaster management — from preparedness to reduction and response — focusing on efforts to build and strengthen regional and local capacity.

2. **Mr. Egeland** (United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator), Moderator, said that natural disasters represented one of the greatest humanitarian challenges, which was underestimated by the international media and did not receive adequate attention. The fact that in an average year seven times more people were affected by natural disasters than by complex emergencies, wars and conflicts underscored the importance of preparing for, responding to and preventing such disasters. Currently, South Asia was affected by the worst monsoon floods for more than a decade with millions of people rendered homeless. In that regard, two of the countries most affected, Bangladesh and India, were among the countries with the best preparedness and response mechanisms in the world. While the international community stood ready to respond whenever required to do so, those two countries demonstrated that the first line of defence was the best line of defence, when it worked.

3. The Council would hear presentations about international response mechanisms, including the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), which could assemble and deploy United Nations disaster assessment teams and search-and-rescue teams anywhere in the world within hours of a disaster, as had been done in the case of the earthquake in Bam, Islamic Republic of Iran. The discussions would also cover the early warning mechanisms of a number of United Nations agencies as well as efforts to build local and international preparedness and response capacity. Early warning was not very useful if it did not lead to early intervention and early response and preparedness.

4. **Mr. Graisse** (Deputy Executive Director, World Food Programme (WFP)), panellist, said that preparing for natural disasters required both planning and flexibility in executing those plans in order to respond effectively to the needs of affected countries and populations. Since the late 1990s, the international community had enhanced its ability to address emergency preparedness and response issues at the local, regional and global levels. WFP had reviewed and strengthened its capacity for early warning, enhanced its information management capacity and strengthened the ability of its decentralized regional bureaux to prepare for potential emerging crises and adjust to shifting scenarios on the ground.

5. Overall, early warning capacities had been well-developed, as demonstrated by the joint work of the humanitarian community through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the use of humanitarian common services to support operational response. However, the key was not just to issue warnings but to ensure that structures at the provincial and grass-roots levels were capable of a rapid response. "Early warning" must become "early action". Quick response to natural disasters also required flexible programming tools to rapidly meet the increased humanitarian needs caused by a disaster. In that regard, WFP had developed an extensive institutional network of development assistance in schools, mother-and-child health centres and food-for-work activities. Such structures were effective because their administrative mechanisms were already in place and could be expanded quickly in reaction to disasters, in collaboration and consultation with local authorities, further promoting government participation and capacity-building.

6. The crises in southern Africa highlighted a number of important issues with regard to emergency

preparedness. Indeed, poor and erratic rainfall in mid-2002 in that region had led to major food shortages, aggravating a situation already made fragile by HIV/AIDS, chronic poverty and weakened governance structures. WFP had quickly designed and sent to donors a special operation for regional logistics coordination through an office established in Johannesburg and food had begun to move very quickly. It had also assisted other agencies, including non-governmental organizations, with a separate food pipeline by sharing the logistics assessment information and helping to avoid port congestion. In that regard, the Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs for Southern Africa had consistently noted the need for collaboration between all stakeholders — national Governments, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations — as essential for meeting people's needs in southern Africa. The Special Envoy's most recent mission had strongly suggested that the United Nations should increasingly rationalize its use of resources to develop a United Nations response, as opposed to agency-specific initiatives.

7. Another main finding of that mission was the need for capacity-building in that region. While the United Nations system had already provided substantial report to the Vulnerability Assessment Committees of the Southern African Development Community, it needed to continue to help Governments rebuild their capacity for service delivery at the community level. It was also vital that early warning systems, including indicators on natural disasters and socio-economic factors, should be strengthened at both regional and national levels. Furthermore, vulnerability assessments must be improved to include the systematic monitoring of market prices and non-food needs analysis, cross-border trade and better understanding of linkages between HIV/AIDS, food security, malnutrition and coping strategies.

8. Bangladesh was a good example of what could be achieved by improving natural disaster management through the building of national capacity. WFP, bilateral donors and other partners from the United Nations and non-governmental organizations had supported that Government's national food security policy and food assistance programmes. Over the past decade, the Government had become less reliant on international assistance in responding to natural disasters and could more effectively manage its own disaster mitigation activities.

9. One innovative approach currently being explored by WFP was acute hunger insurance for people affected by weather-related disasters. WFP and the World Bank had begun a project to develop a formal insurance mechanism which would provide cash aid at the appropriate time and create important incentives to mitigate risk. The project, which built upon existing insurance instruments, would also allow the international humanitarian community to draw upon the financial and technical resources of the private insurance sector to help meet better and in a more timely fashion the acute food needs of victims of natural disasters.

10. **Ms. Taft** (Assistant Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)), panellist, said that the impact from natural disasters was devastating for those caught unprepared and in some respects greater than the impact from conflict. More than 3 million people had perished in natural disasters over the past two decades. In many countries, natural disasters had wiped out in a matter of hours hard-earned development gains that had been decades in the making. The immediate response to such crises was dominated by humanitarian assistance and emergency management. As in post-conflict situations, however, there was often a planning gap between the humanitarian assistance and recovery phases.

11. When the international community did not plan for recovery, it often lost an opportunity to make sure that its early responses avoided risks. In that regard, very careful planning should take into account the need to reduce vulnerability by ensuring, for example, that houses in a seismic zone were rebuilt to certain standards or that they were not located in flood plains and were storm-resistant. Crises often offered opportunities for change and for establishing foundations for sustainable development. Natural disasters compromised development, but short-sighted development choices increased disaster risks. Reckless urbanization, the concentration of poor people in hazard-prone areas, unsafe buildings and environmental degradation all magnified the potential impact of disaster.

12. While the humanitarian community had helped immensely in mitigating the loss and suffering associated with disasters, more action was needed to undertake long-term measures to mitigate disaster risks, particularly if the Millennium Development Goals were to be achieved. There was a need, first, to

improve collective understanding of risk and vulnerability, since natural disasters and their devastating impact on society were not necessarily inevitable. In that regard, UNDP had developed a global disaster risk index (DRI) which measured the relative vulnerability of countries to three key natural hazards — earthquakes, tropical cyclones and floods — and identified development factors that contributed to increased risk levels. DRI demonstrated how countries with similar levels of exposure to natural hazards experienced widely differing impacts, proving that natural disasters and their aftermath were often man-made rather than natural. UNDP was working with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme on disaster reduction and developing web-based tools and an overview of best practices in risk management, as well as on other tools to be introduced during the World Conference on Disaster Reduction.

13. Secondly, there was a need for an enabling environment for risk reduction, with a focus on governance and capacity-building. Improving governance for risk management required that disaster risk considerations should be mainstreamed into a broader range of governmental and civil society institutions. Thirdly, it must be ensured that where disaster struck, there should be transitional recovery programming that looked beyond the immediate emergency. That required building on local capacities, rebuilding structures that were seismically resistant as well as increased coordination with a whole range of partners, ensuring that risk reduction was considered in key aspects such as legislation, national development plans and poverty reduction strategy papers. UNDP stood ready to assist with the training to build those national capacities.

14. In conclusion, she reiterated the importance of risk reduction and prevention as central components of the bridge between humanitarian and recovery efforts. Despite the connection between poverty and vulnerability, funding for capacity-building in disaster reduction and recovery remained a challenge and UNDP looked forward to working with all partners to try to build more sustainable communities that would be less prone to disaster.

15. **Mr. Frisch** (Chairman, International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG)), panellist, said that his presentation on the recent experience, trends and global challenges of international search-and-rescue would draw from the lessons learned from recent major events, particularly the earthquakes in Bam, Islamic Republic of Iran, and in Algeria in 2003. His presentation would focus on rapidity, coordination, effectiveness and consistency, all of which were linked with preparedness and strengthening national and regional capacity-building.

16. With regard to rapidity, the national and international response to rapid-onset natural disasters must be immediate in order to be effective and efficient, knowing that time was a life-saving factor. It was therefore essential to build up the capacities of teams in disaster-prone countries. In that regard, while the transferred know-how from experienced teams had been a part of the INSARAG strategy for the past 10 years, that strategy would be revised during the current year in the light of the Secretary-General's recommendations.

17. Turning to coordination, he endorsed paragraph 48 of the Secretary-General's report (A/59/93-E/2004/74), noting the paramount role of United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams in any international assistance effort. The duplication of coordination mechanisms could not be allowed in such situations and the use of the Virtual On-Site Operations Coordination Center and UNDAC, activated and monitored by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Geneva as overall coordinator, offered a measurable value added. Furthermore, discussions had started between the Office and the European Union in order to avoid duplications on the ground.

18. As far as effectiveness was concerned, while immediate local response was often the most effective, only fully equipped, self-contained and high-quality international search-and-rescue teams should be authorized to go into affected countries to perform relief work. The effectiveness and efficiency of such international teams could be monitored from time to time, for example, through regular participation in training exercises or even peer reviews. In the aftermath of a disaster, it was important to provide thorough, practical and factual reporting on the situation to the local population, including families of victims.

19. Turning to consistency, he noted that any serious disaster risk reduction efforts in a context of the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction required investment in long-term

structural prevention activities in parallel with preparedness projects. Much needed to be done at the national level to mainstream disaster reduction into budgets and into long-term plans, while the international community should be closely associated with such efforts, as should civil society organizations, including the private sector. Disaster reduction belonged squarely on the agenda of the humanitarian community, as acknowledged at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction should help to create the necessary momentum for intensifying common action in that regard.

20. **Mr. Mohaghegh** (Operations Coordinator, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)), panellist, said that the incapacity of developing countries to make sufficient investment in disaster mitigation greatly increased their vulnerability to natural disasters. Meanwhile, the trend of natural disasters, whether sudden-onset or slow-onset, showed no decrease on the global scale. The damage caused to communities must be measured thoroughly, and effective preparedness and response mechanisms must be foreseen.

21. Effective preparedness should be complementary to long-term preventive measures including vulnerability and risk reduction, and should be based on awareness, which must be established at the community level, among families and individuals, and in rural and remote areas, in particular disaster-prone areas. Efforts to strengthen disaster preparedness should aim first and foremost at capacity-building of communities, and should focus on the least developed, most vulnerable communities. Collaborative mechanisms were needed where the different actors cooperated on the basis of shared principles and objectives. In particular, States should seek ways of promoting social cooperation in disaster preparedness and enabling potential resources and capacities to be identified and utilized.

22. The experience of IFRC and its national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies in 181 countries was a good example of community-based and comprehensive disaster preparedness. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Red Crescent Society had benefited from its community-based disaster preparedness to respond effectively to various natural disasters, including the Bam earthquake on 26 December 2003. Because they had been trained and organized in advance, over 18,000 volunteers mobilized from all over the country had been able to provide rescue, relief and shelter to thousands of victims. Within 48 hours, more than 15,000 injured persons had received emergency medical care, and about 15,000 people had been given food, shelter and other relief. While the generous support of the international humanitarian community to the Bam operation had been much appreciated, the fact remained that the number of victims rescued by local relief workers and volunteers had far exceeded those rescued by international search-and-rescue teams. During the recent earthquake in Morocco, the Moroccan Red Crescent had benefited from the capacity of its volunteers and branches and presented a successful example of community-based disaster preparedness and coordination with the Government. In both earthquakes, IFRC had deployed field assessment and coordination teams and emergency response units, and also launched international appeals.

23. Coordination of international humanitarian assistance was the key to successful disaster response at the local, national and international levels. The role of local communities and beneficiaries should be taken into account much more fully. At the national level, disaster preparedness plans must include a clear definition of roles and responsibilities of the various actors, taking into account the social and cultural characteristics of the country concerned. States should allocate more time and resources to disaster preparedness and coordination and networking with other civil society groups. A long-term and comprehensive approach to disaster preparedness and response was needed at the national level.

24. Respect for the dignity of affected populations and beneficiaries must be considered the first principle of any disaster relief operation. Victims should be treated as equal partners in humanitarian assistance. International humanitarian intervention should play a complementary and auxiliary role, and the approach should be one of capacity-building and long-term preparedness in the affected population, instead of creating a dependency on external assistance. International assistance could then play a positive and constructive role in promotion of civil society.

25. States should facilitate international humanitarian assistance by providing access to the affected population and allowing the entry of humanitarian aid. The IFRC International Disaster Response Laws, Rules

and Principles were an appropriate framework for the effective delivery of international assistance. They had been successfully used during the Bam operation when, for the first time, the United Nations and IFRC had coordinated their appeals for international assistance to avoid any gap or overlap and had launched both appeals jointly.

26. **Mr. Arrion** (European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO)), panellist, said that there was a clear need for enhanced preparedness, given the evolution of humanitarian needs. Throughout the 1990s, an estimated 200 million people had been affected by natural disasters each year, and an estimated 80,000 had been killed. Of those victims, 97 per cent had been in developing countries. Good humanitarian donorship required an increased emphasis on consistency, transparency and advocacy. Furthermore, good donors should focus on appropriate forward-planning instruments and methodologies, early warning and alert mechanisms, rapid decision-making processes, effective implementation of assistance through high-quality partners, close cooperation with other key humanitarian players and enhanced preparedness for a smooth transition from relief to rehabilitation and development. Among the innovative approaches to be supported by good donors, early warning monitoring must be permanent and continuous. The use of new technologies, including capacity-building for Internet-based crisis monitoring and alerts, should also be encouraged. The European Commission had developed a process of global needs assessments through which it had adopted a comparative approach across 130 countries using global indicators. Among other innovations, it had also developed a disaster risk index, which broke down risk levels both globally and within various regions and countries.

27. **Mr. Egeland** (United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator), Moderator, invited participants to comment on the presentations made by the panellists.

28. **Mr. Simancas** (Observer for Mexico) said that everything possible had to be done to prevent or counter the effects of disasters. However, the primary role, whether in cases of natural disasters or conflicts, devolved on States, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

29. **Mr. Faber** (Observer for the Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia; and the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, said that the European Union recognized that the international community was failing to invest adequately in disaster preparedness and hoped that the upcoming World Conference on Disaster Reduction would provide a forum to address the issues of capacity-building, contingency planning, preparedness and ownership. As the European Union prepared its own disaster preparedness strategy to complement the existing United Nations arrangements, it wondered how both would blend with national strategies. The European Union was also interested in how the private sector in each country could helpfully be involved in disaster response and longer-term preparedness.

30. **Mr. Arrion** (ECHO) said that the European Union's response mechanism was primarily designed to work within the Union but could be extended beyond its geographical space. Problems of duplication would have to be avoided in field operations by coordinating procedures with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. To avoid competition with the more global United Nations system, he envisaged an arrangement operating within concentric circles whereby a light and flexible European Union response or planning could feed into the global setting.

31. **Mr. Frisch** (Chairman, International Search and Rescue Advisory Group) said that the international community should focus on building self-sufficient capacity in every country for search and rescue, relief and ultimately, recovery and reconstruction. Teams could also be deployed in case of need elsewhere for training and other preparedness activities. Most important would be coordination among sectoral ministries but also among humanitarian relief and assistance agencies, with host countries taking the lead. He found it unacceptable that participating agencies were reluctant to accept coordination.

32. **Mr. Mohaghegh** (Operations Coordinator, IFRC) said that it was practically impossible to achieve 100 per cent preparedness because the very concept of an emergency, based on the element of time and the scale of the disaster, suggested that control of the damage incurred was beyond the capacity of local communities. Efforts to improve local capacity must be ongoing, because disaster preparedness provided an

opportunity to take stock of local resources, challenges and circumstances. It was quite natural that differences existed between international and local systems of disaster preparedness because such differences were based on variations between national circumstances. There was therefore a need to gain a deeper understanding of each country's capacities, systems and resources. In executing emergency response, it must be recognized that there might be potential resources and systems already existing in the country concerned. In addition, an effective information management system and coordination mechanism should already be in place to make use of local knowledge and shared information, without losing sight of the objective of local capacity-building and long-term self-sufficiency in the affected communities.

33. **Mr. Egeland** (United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator) referred to a memorandum of understanding on cooperation that was being finalized with the European Commission to guarantee full harmony in field operations. Based on recent disaster experiences, it had been shown that field work could be further streamlined and that lines of responsibility could be clarified, particularly in situations where time was of the essence.

34. **Ms. Taft** (Assistant Administrator, UNDP) said that there were usually local resources available in countries and communities where disasters occurred that could be channelled for recovery. It was important for donors and responding entities to know what was available. Local procurement was not only an important means by which to boost the economy but it also ensured that the commodities provided were appropriate to the community concerned. Since the private sector was usually involved in rebuilding infrastructure after disasters occurred, it was important to incorporate safety standards into the reconstruction phase and to ensure that private contractors understood techniques in building risk-resistant structures. To that end, national authorities could play a useful role in providing training and partnerships.

35. She welcomed the World Bank and WFP insurance scheme initiative and said that UNDP was also interested in insurance for situations that extended beyond drought and food security. She also saw much scope for private sector involvement in the improvement of communications through greater use of information technology. The best means of communication, however, was listening to the needs and advice expressed by the local population.

36. **Mr. Graisse** (Deputy Executive Director, WFP) clarified that WFP was actively exploring the possibility of developing an insurance scheme and that discussions with the World Bank were currently under way. On the question of private sector involvement, he said that there certainly was a role for the private sector; however, the main source of funding was the public sector, either international donor agencies or individual countries.

37. **Ms. Golberg** (Canada), noting the tremendous progress made in the area of natural disaster preparedness, particularly in terms of accountability and coordination, and referring to the work of UNDP in mainstreaming disaster reduction into development programmes, asked what UNDP would describe as the key challenges encountered in persuading countries to integrate disaster reduction strategies into their sustainable development plans. She also commented that risk and vulnerability needed to be considered beyond the country or local community level to include an understanding of differences in vulnerabilities among individuals.

38. Referring to the collaboration between local and international emergency response efforts during the recent earthquake in the Islamic Republic of Iran, she asked how capacity-building could be enhanced between IFRC and national societies, and what role the international donor community could play in that regard. She further highlighted the importance of advance preparations and suggested that donors should enhance their preparedness mechanisms in order to be ready and able to respond to the needs assessments that arose. She also wondered where the UNDAC mechanism could fit into the common United Nations response.

39. **Mr. Backström** (Finland) asked whether any calculations had been made to determine the cost of helping developing countries to reach the same level of preparedness as had been achieved in the industrialized world. He believed that raising the level of preparedness throughout the international community once and for all, was crucial since effective disaster preparedness and response were the keys to saving lives and property.

40. **Mr. Mosselmans** (United Kingdom) outlined measures recently adopted by his Government's

Department for International Development to encourage country offices to integrate disaster preparedness into long-term development programmes. In that regard, he wondered whether the representatives of ECHO or INSARAG could offer any advice on best practices or general guidance on disaster reduction strategy.

41. His delegation agreed that it was vital to encourage developing countries to integrate risk reduction into their development planning, and found it regrettable that the analysis of disaster risk management had often not been incorporated into development strategies. The United Kingdom also supported the concept of a common United Nations response as opposed to strictly agency-specific initiatives, but recognized the need for donors to support and strengthen the international agencies that were most prominent in the field. It recognized the role of climate change in disaster reduction and preparedness and would continue to accord high priority to climate change and environmental issues in various forums.

42. **Ms. Eckey** (Observer for Norway) said that in the delivery of relief aid it was important for donor countries to consider the most efficient use of limited resources. In the light of the comments made by the panellists on the need to listen to beneficiaries and other vulnerable groups in disaster-affected areas as prime sources of information and guidance, she asked how the organizations represented by the panel and their implementing agencies ensured that those sectors were given an opportunity to be heard and to participate in relief efforts.

43. **Mr. Shimamori** (Japan) said that his Government looked forward to hosting the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in January 2005. He fully supported the view that greater emphasis should be placed on risk reduction and response, and especially welcomed the importance previous speakers had attached to the involvement of local populations and the need to incorporate disaster management into development policy.

44. With reference to comments made by the representative of IFRC on efforts to raise awareness and promote preparedness at the level of families, he said that Japan had learned from its experience, in the aftermath of the Kobe earthquake, that close-knit communities were best poised to successfully mitigate the adverse effects of disasters. He asked what challenges the Iranian response and relief efforts had faced in enhancing awareness and what remedies had been adopted in meeting those challenges.

45. **Mr. Zhang** (China) said that countries were increasingly devoting attention to capacity-building and disaster response. The experience gained from the recent earthquakes in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Morocco confirmed that rapid response was critical to saving lives and highlighted the value of government intervention in providing effective logistical support. Noting that the United Nations had adopted a number of measures to improve national capacity-building in preparedness and response to natural disasters, he said that China welcomed all attempts to forge effective international cooperation in disaster relief management and disaster reduction techniques to enhance national capacities.

46. **Mr. Oosthuizen** (Observer for South Africa) said that a preparatory meeting for the World Conference on Disaster Reduction had recently been held in South Africa. One problem experienced in the African region was that although many of the publications on disaster risks and risk reduction were available, they were too academic and there were no translations into local languages. Another was that the cost of training was very high. He would welcome examples of best practice in those areas, and also sought suggestions on how to use the mass media to disseminate information.

47. **Mr. Ustinov** (Russian Federation) said that strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance, and enhancing early warning and prevention systems, would stimulate the creation of an international network of rescue teams. It was also necessary to create mechanisms to exploit and coordinate national capacities to deal with disasters. It was important that enhanced international efforts should not detract from national capacities. The Secretariat should work to improve ways of financing humanitarian assistance through the donor community. Specialist suppliers of equipment should be utilized. His country, for example, specialized in rescue and transport equipment. It played an active part in the weather monitoring service of the World Meteorological Organization, notably in the exchange of meteorological data.

48. **Mr. Arrion** (ECHO), referring to the question raised by the representative of the United Kingdom,

said that the best way of mainstreaming disaster preparedness into long-term development programmes was through teamwork, not allowing any one person or department to formulate strategy. In ECHO, humanitarian operations were coordinated by a support group comprising representatives of the various operations involved, which met every month to plan and coordinate a joint strategy. It was also important to ensure sound policy leadership. The European Commission was fortunate in that regard, because the same Commissioner was responsible for both development and humanitarian operations. On the question of listening to victims, ECHO worked through the implementing agencies, the United Nations system agencies and non-governmental organizations at international, national and local levels, to find out which coping mechanisms existed on the ground. On the issue of local languages, national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies could play an instrumental role in translating rules, regulations and guidelines into local languages. The question of training costs was more difficult to answer. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction would provide a good opportunity to discuss it.

49. **Mr. Mohaghegh** (Operations Coordinator, IFRC), responding to the question put by the representative of Canada, explained that IFRC was an umbrella organization bringing together a huge network of national societies. Its role was to assist its member societies to promote the activities of volunteers and young people at the country level, and to share with them good practices learned from their sister societies and from the international community, Governments and the United Nations through operations in disaster situations.

50. The international community could do much to help in capacity-building: first, by recognizing the contribution of civil society groups, especially the Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers, to national planning and national disaster response; and secondly, by promoting the integration of disaster preparedness into national long-term development plans. It could also provide technical support to IFRC and to national societies for cooperation in disaster-related fields. Finally, given that the control of damage caused by disasters was beyond the capacity of affected countries, it could offer both financial and non-financial resources.

51. On the question of listening to beneficiaries and victims, he emphasized that the burden of loss suffered in a disaster was so great that everyone in the affected country could be regarded as a victim, and the listening should take place at both national and local levels. Local protagonists should be treated as equal partners in relief and rehabilitation. Local resources should be drawn upon in those efforts, and local cultures and languages must be respected.

52. As for the question of awareness raising, it was important to use the mass media, including radio and television, to promote disaster preparedness. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, special programmes run by the Ministries of Agriculture and Education, through 250 institutions of higher education and 15,000 schools, engaged the youth committees of the Red Crescent in disaster preparedness and training. Under an agreement with the Ministry of Education, teachers working in remote areas of the country helped to promote disaster preparedness in their communities. It was important to localize the concept of disaster preparedness as far as possible. In that sense, it was better to work at inculcating the concept than to import and translate printed materials.

53. **Mr. Frisch** (Chairman, INSARAG), replying to the representative of the United Kingdom, said that the search and rescue mandate came into play in the first moments after a disaster struck; INSARAG therefore had the opportunity to give immediate assistance in reconstruction and rehabilitation, and to promote disaster preparedness and prevention. In future, development cooperation agencies should focus more on actual risks and threats, and should carry out integrated risk analysis. Hazard and risk mapping was extremely important: for example, it was useless to talk about agricultural development in mountain areas, without allowing for avalanches and landslides caused by earthquakes and floods. Development cooperation and humanitarian aid in the same country should go hand in hand. Specialists deployed worldwide could build partnerships in the course of their work, and could build capacity for disaster preparedness and prevention, including training, in areas in which they had gained experience. There was currently a tendency for institutions lacking the necessary experience to offer training, a practice which should be curtailed.

54. On the question raised by the observer for South Africa, he said that INSARAG had recently established an outpost in Tunisia, financed by Germany and

Switzerland, which was translating disaster preparedness and response guidelines, initially into Arabic. Given extra resources, the translation and publication of such materials could be included in future development programmes.

55. **Ms. Taft** (Assistant Administrator, UNDP), replying to the representative of Canada, said that one of the challenges facing UNDP was that few of its country offices were investing in infrastructure, and it was very difficult to galvanize them into dealing with disaster-related issues. UNDP supported official relief programmes; however, many disasters, such as storm surges and earthquakes, had regional dimensions which its country offices were ill-equipped to tackle. The best time to promote natural disaster prevention and build capacity for risk reduction was immediately after a disaster had struck, when public attention was at its peak. Disaster preparedness and prevention must become part of the culture, including among children at school, in countries which were prone to disasters such as hurricanes or storm surges. UNDAC teams worked with Governments to remedy crises from a development perspective.

56. **Mr. Graisse** (Deputy Executive Director, WFP), referring to the question raised by the United Kingdom representative about a common United Nations response, said that the agencies in the system must, above all, plan ahead and work out together what should be done in countries at risk. At the same time, agencies must perform their own tasks well, otherwise coordination could not possibly succeed. The crisis in southern Africa was not only caused by drought; it was multifactorial, involving HIV/AIDS and other non-environmental causes. The response of the agencies must be broad enough to encompass them all.

57. **Mr. Egeland** (United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator), Moderator, summing up the discussion, noted that a number of speakers had emphasized the importance of national response capacity. Dealing with disasters was indeed primarily the responsibility of Governments. As pointed out in several General Assembly resolutions, international assistance was complementary to their efforts, its purpose being to foster national response mechanisms. The ability of the international community to assist in responding to disasters was better than ever before, thanks to improved tools. Sixty countries, as well as partner agencies such as IFRC and ECHO played a part in the UNDAC system. That augured well for future improved coordination with the donor community, and for the forthcoming World Conference on Disaster Reduction.

58. In the media and in the mindset of politicians in many Member States, however, the level of disaster awareness was too low. Response mechanisms in some countries, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, India and Bangladesh were improving, while other countries were lagging behind. In the southern Sahelian countries especially, the current crisis was deepening day by day, and the outside world was scarcely aware of its gravity. As had been pointed out, it was not enough to send in an UNDAC team when disaster hit. A collective effort was needed by the whole of the country team, and by all United Nations agencies, partners, donors and Governments at every level, to lift the affected countries out of crisis. It was to be hoped the ideas and suggestions made during the discussion would be translated into action at the field level.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.